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# Housing and Transportation Problems in Relation to Labor Placement

By JOHN IHLDER

ONE of our national weeklies, in an interpretive account of the reconstruction conference held by the United States Chamber of Commerce at Atlantic City in December, 1918, found the basic reason for the liberal attitude of the thousands of employers there assembled a fear of labor. This did not mean that employers have not reached their present attitude of mind by way of enlightened self-interest, that there has not been a leaven of genuine altruism to hasten their rising. Nor does it leave out of account that the employer is unconsciously going with a great tide in human affairs. After the French revolution the tide of interest in community affairs, in the affairs of our neighbors, ran out. Decade after decade we became more and more convinced that the salvation of the world lay in individualism. The less government the better government; the poor are the victims of vices for which they individually are responsible; the employer's responsibility ceases at the factory gates. So the tide kept running out until it left bare the ill-smelling mud flats of our slum areas, and all that those areas typify. Then slowly the tide began to turn. Even the most successful individuals could not continue to believe absolutely in individualism when its bad effects became so manifest. So they founded associations for the improvement of the condition of the poor. The roots of nearly all our great social organizations run back to that time of benignant lords and ladies bountiful before the middle of the last century when, despite his convictions, man was beginning to see that he could not be saved by individualism alone. Then appeared in England, where individualism had been most loudly hailed, Charles Dickens, whose novels were social tracts sugar coated; Octavia Hill, leader in the early days of the charity organization and the housing movements; and various "good" lords of high degree who sponsored social legislation of a tentative kind—the nobility responded more rapidly than the wealthy bourgeoisie. Then appeared also Karl Marx, whose methods were different. But

whatever their ideas, all had their part in turning the tide which today is running strong toward community interest and community control. Whether they would or not the employers at Atlantic City must have been borne along by it, but their reason, their self-interest or their fear, will cause them to make better progress by swimming than they would by floating.

It is this world-wide tide of community interest, strong enough even to affect the conduct of the great war, overcome national prejudice, and perhaps make possible a league of free nations, that is leading us to study such things as housing and transportation problems in relation to labor placement. A few years ago such a study would have been deemed theoretical by practical minds which believed implicitly in an unalterable and unmodifiable law of supply and demand; which saw, without seeing, the banks of rivers turned into dump heaps and sources of municipal water supply polluted; which accepted without question the blighting of a city's most accessible and useable areas and spent millions of dollars on needlessly expensive and often needless systems of transportation, merely because they had not been trained to see a community as a community but only as an aggregation of individuals.

The broad outlines of the question dealt with by this paper may be stated briefly. The details would fill volumes, and but little has yet been assembled in useable form. Labor placement, we shall assume, includes labor retention, i.e., not only the securing of a supply of labor but what is more important, the reducing of its turnover. The latter part of the question has been under scrutiny for some time and many obvious reasons for our great labor turnover have been noted and some have been changed. As in infant mortality, even a superficial study brought to light certain conditions that a minimum of group or community action could change—as the substitution of clean and modified milk for the dirty, diluted stuff that had been sold before—and which being changed caused an immediate and notable improvement.

So easy and so efficacious, comparatively, are these first changes that some of us have been inclined to persuade ourselves that they comprise our whole task. An alley that has been buried under an accumulation of filth is vastly improved by shovel work, but it is not really clean until broom and water have played their part.

So improvements within the plant, whether of physical conditions or of management, will make notable improvement in labor turnover and at a comparatively small expenditure of thought and energy, for they require but a minimum of community or group action.

But having achieved so much we find that the task is not completed. A generation ago our present condition, in our more progressive industrial enterprises at least, would have seemed almost utopian. But having done so much we find that labor turnover is not yet reduced to the place where it should be and dimly we are beginning to see that labor turnover is a matter of concern not only to individual employers but to those who are concerned with such community problems as deserting husbands; and that conversely the employer has reason to be concerned, because of his interest in the efficiency of his own plant, in these community problems. The deserting husband not only leaves destitute wife and children for the community to support but he loses the spirit which makes a first class workman and by degrees becomes a drifter, a vagrant, one of the army of unemployables the attempt to employ whom is one of the great wastes of industry. And the reason for desertion in the great majority of cases probably lies quite outside the factory gates and only the effect is felt inside.

Had that man lived in a better home, in a better neighborhood, had his children attended better schools, had his neighbors been more satisfied with their lot, had more to lose and so have had a different tone in their daily conversation, the deserter would probably have resisted the temptation to which he yielded, perhaps a little thing in itself, but the last of many things big and little,—impatience at the jam in an overcrowded street car to which he was subjected morning and evening, or, of more consequence, remorse that the cost of sociability at the corner saloon made impossible the paying of grocer's bills. These cannot be affected by improvement within the plant; they can be affected only by improvement of living conditions, and the latter may be summarized as improvement of the dwelling.

But here again it is necessary for us to broaden our vision from the individual to the community. Housing betterment began by attempts to improve individual houses, and it made considerable improvement. It did the shovel work—or at least began it—

of somewhat lessening the squalor and filth of slum areas. Transportation began too by accepting existing conditions and seeking only to mitigate them by enabling those who had the time and the money to escape to a better environment. But having done the shovel work where it has been done, we learned that it was after all but superficial, that it must be done over and over again, for it makes no change in the basic conditions which first rendered it necessary. Instead of improved slums, instead of expensive and wasteful means of escape, we begin to realize that there will be economy in abolishing slums, in using transportation not to mitigate the effects of bad conditions but to serve the community as a community. Transportation, even the least expensive forms, is wasteful if used needlessly, wasteful in time, health, money. The more expensive forms, especially the most expensive form, the subway, is ruinous if used as a substitute for walking or even for trolleys.

So both housing and transportation lead us inevitably to city planning, and city planning is based upon two things: first, the needs of business and industry, which create the city; second, upon the needs of the home, which make the city worth creating. Having come then to visualize the city as an entity, not as a mere aggregation of individuals, we are able to consider the proper distribution of its parts and to plan for their needs.

Business and industry must first be considered because from them flows the wealth upon which all else depends. Those areas best suited to their needs should be devoted to them. Transportation, here including not only passenger but goods transportation, must be planned to serve them primarily. But, though they are considered first, they cannot be considered exclusively; the satisfying of their needs may have to be modified if it takes too much from satisfying the living needs of those for whose benefit business and industry exist.

The living needs of the people may come second in order of consideration, but not in importance. These living needs fundamentally are first, a wholesome environment, which means not only a sanitary dwelling—to that point we have already progressed in some of our cities—but space for outdoor life, opportunity for education and recreation, amenities that promoted sense of community well-being and second, accessibility to the places of employment which support all this. That is, our places of em-

ployment must be distributed in such a way that their business needs may be most economically met and-at the same time that they may be accessible to those who operate them.

Philadelphia, by happenstance, for it was only a matter of happening, not of conscious planning, illustrates in a rough and unordered way what in the future we shall do in a systematic way. Its industries are distributed in many centers and as a consequence its workers in unusually large proportion can live within walking distance of their work. As further consequences its workers in very unusually large proportion live in single family houses, and its transportation system has lagged behind those of competitor cities in mechanical development. Had Philadelphia, instead of drifting along from a fortuitously good start, been consciously planned and developed according to ideas only now coming into vogue, it would today be a model for other cities to imitate. The fundamentals are there, though long unrecognized; the failure has come in working out details. Now that the fundamentals are being recognized, though not always clearly, and now that the tide is running strong toward community development and control, Philadelphia has the best opportunity of any of our largest cities to develop its housing and its transportation in such a way as to attract labor and to reduce labor turnover.

In its new and rapidly growing industrial areas outside the present city it can develop a transportation system designed to meet real needs, not those due to mal-adjustment, and consequently a productive system, not a wasteful one. In these areas there is still space to develop the kind of housing that will make the worker glad to come and loath to leave. And while it is doing this it may, if the tide runs strong enough or if its leading citizens swim hard enough, gradually correct the worst faults of its present housing-land overcrowding and insanitary conditions, and modify its plans for transportation so that they will not only bring it increased business from outside, but will make passenger transit within its borders efficient and economical—high-speed trunk lines connecting important centers and fed by less expensive local lines. For passenger transportation within a city should be only for those who must travel long distances, and the number who must travel long distances daily should be reduced to a minimum by building as large a proportion as possible of houses within walking distance of places of employment.